PUBLIC OPINION

IN ZIMBABWE ABOUT THE UNITED NATIONS

The UN Department of Public Information commissioned a public opinion poll in Zimbabwe to assess the awareness, knowledge and image of the UN. The poll was carried out during March-April 1991.

THE RESULTS IN BRIEF

- Six out of ten Zimbabweans are familiar with the United Nations and almost a third are able to identify the UN Secretary-General.
- Awareness and knowledge about the UN is highest among college-educated respondents, and among those who have access to a radio or television set.
- Forty-two percent of those surveyed believe the Organization is doing a good job, while five percent give the UN a poor rating.
- The majority of Zimbabweans surveyed are interested in all UN issues. The Organization's work in the field of housing is at the top of the list.

AWARENESS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

FIGURE 1

AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE UN

Sixty per cent of Zimbabweans have heard of the United Nations. Awareness is highest among those respondents with a college degree (near 100 per cent awareness), and among those who have access to a radio or television set. Awareness is lowest among older respondents, and the rural population.

Fourteen per cent of Zimbabweans are able to name a UN institution or body. The UN institutions or bodies most mentioned are the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Security Council, UNEP, GATT and UNIDO.

Knowledge of the UN is significantly higher among college-educated respondents and among those who listen

ABILITY TO NAME A UN INSTITUTION

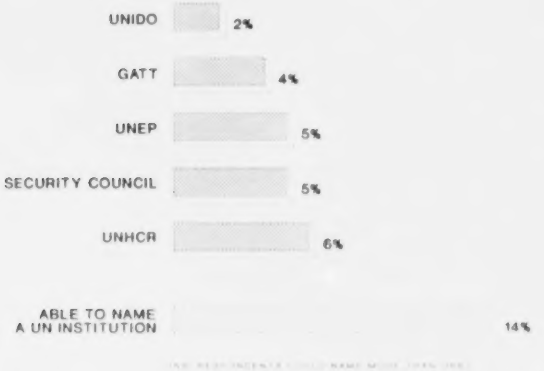


FIGURE 2

UN PERFORMANCE RATING

FIGURE 4

IDENTIFYING UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

FIGURE 3

to English-language radio. Among these groups, more than half are able to correctly identify at least one U N body or institution.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL

Thirty-one per cent of Zimbabweans are able to identify Javier Pérez de Cuellar as the current Secretary-General from a list of five U N Secretaries-General since 1945.

The groups that tend to more correctly identify the current Secretary-General are those who possess a college degree, those who listen to English-language radio, and those who have access to a television set.

RATING UN PERFORMANCE

By a margin of eight to one, Zimbabweans believe that the UN is doing a good job as opposed to a poor job. This positive evaluation is found among all demographic groups, although respondents in the higher income bracket, urban dwellers, those who are college-educated, and users of radio and television give higher evaluations of the UN. Older respondents give slightly lower evaluations of the UN.

REASONS FOR UN PERFORMANCE RATING

Asked to give reasons why the UN is doing a good job, Zimbabweans mentioned the Organization's role in the recent Gulf crisis, although this reason is also dominant among those who criticized the UN. Aid to poor people and to developing countries, and the role of the UN in famine relief efforts, were also mentioned.

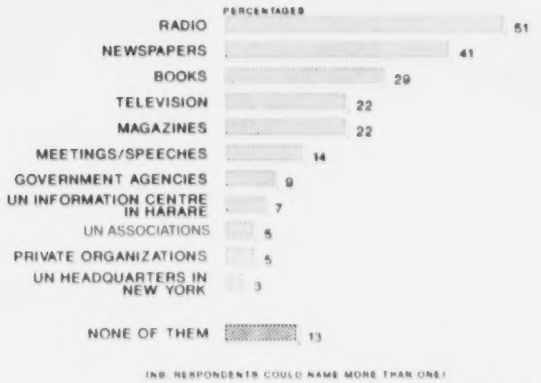
The major reason for rating the Organization's performance as poor is the perception that the UN is unable to promote world peace and/or solve conflicts. The most mentioned conflicts are the Gulf crisis, the Palestinian question, and the situation in Angola. Some respondents also refer to what they perceive as inefficiency in discharging UN services.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Fifty-one per cent of Zimbabweans cite radio as a source of information about the United Nations. This is followed by newspapers, books and television. Fourteen per cent mention meetings and/or speeches. Seven per cent mention the UN Information Centre in Harare as a major source of information about the UN.

Eighteen per cent of Zimbabweans recall being taught about the UN at school. In most cases, teaching about the UN takes place in high school.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON THE UN



(NB: RESPONDENTS COULD NAME MORE THAN ONE)

FIGURE 5

TEACHING ABOUT THE UN

FIGURE 6

INTEREST IN UN ISSUES

Most Zimbabweans appear interested in all UN issues. The Organization's activities in the fields of housing and international peace and security are of greatest interest to Zimbabweans.

Generally speaking, there are no significant differences among various demographic groups in terms of expressed interest. However, female respondents were almost twice as likely as male respondents to express interest in receiving information about UN activities dealing with equal rights for women.

CONCLUSION

Approximately two thirds of Zimbabweans have heard of the United Nations, and about one third are able to correctly identify the current Secretary-General.

Their opinion about the UN is generally favourable. Positive attitudes about the Organization appear to focus on the UN's role and the humanitarian actions undertaken in the recent Gulf crisis.

The media play a significant role in how Zimbabweans learn about the UN. Radio is the most used medium. The UN Information Centre in Harare is an important direct source of information about United Nations activities.

For more information, contact the Programme Evaluation and Communications Research Unit,
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INTEREST IN UNITED NATIONS ISSUES

	VERY INTERESTED	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	NOT INTERESTED
IMPROVING HOUSING CONDITIONS	84	10	6
INT'L PEACE AND SECURITY	81	13	6
CHILDREN'S ISSUES	78	15	7
HUMAN RIGHTS	78	15	7
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION	76	16	8
THE WORK OF THE UN IN GENERAL	76	16	9
CRIME PREVENTION	75	17	9
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	74	17	9
WORLD FOOD PROBLEMS	73	17	9
DISARMAMENT	73	16	12
AIDS	73	11	16
APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA	72	14	14
AFRICAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY	71	18	11
REFUGEES & DISASTER RELIEF	70	19	10
TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT	69	20	11
DECOLONIZATION	68	19	13
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION	68	15	17
POPULATION ISSUES	67	21	12
DRUG ABUSE	65	15	20
EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN	61	17	22
INT'L LAW & TREATIES	57	26	17
NEW WORLD INFORMATION ORDER	54	26	20
INT'L DEBT CRISIS	52	26	22

FIGURE 7

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

The poll was commissioned in co-operation with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and was conducted by Research International East Africa (RIEA). Representatives from RIEA interviewed a nationwide representative sample of 2,500 men and women aged 16 and over. The interviews were carried out face-to-face in respondents' homes during four weeks in March-April 1991. Over eighty per cent of the initially selected sample successfully completed the interview. The margin of sampling error is estimated at ± 3 per cent.

The Programme Evaluation and Communications Research Unit of the United Nations Department of Public Information undertakes public opinion polls to "analyse trends of public opinion throughout the world about the activities of the United Nations and the extent to which an informed understanding of the work of the United Nations is being secured" (General Assembly resolution 13(I), annex I, paragraph 13 of 13 February 1946).

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

"Violence is defined as any act, omission, controlling behaviour or threat, in any sphere, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological injury to women."

—Draft Declaration on Violence against Women Recommended by 1991 UN Expert Group Meeting

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

"Violence against women in the family and society is pervasive and cuts across lines of income, class and culture." This statement is contained in the Draft Declaration on Violence against Women prepared by an Expert Group Meeting on this subject. The meeting was sponsored by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and held at Vienna from 11 to 15 November 1991.

There are many variations on this vicious theme, ranging from the most subtle and indirect to the most blatant, including:

- *verbal abuse*
- *psychological/emotional abuse*
- *economic deprivation*
- *sexual harassment*
- *prostitution*
- *female infanticide*
- *genital mutilation*
- *battery*
- *rape*
- *murder*

That such abuse transcends all boundaries is evidenced by the following excerpts from a recent UN publication on women:[1]

▸ India had 999 registered cases of dowry deaths in 1985, 1,319 in 1986 and 1,786 in 1987.

▸ In Austria in 1985, domestic violence against the wife was cited as a contributing factor to the breakdown of the marriage in 59 per cent of 1,500 divorce cases.

▸ In the United Kingdom there were 1,334 rapes recorded in 1983, 1,433 in 1984 and 1,842 in 1985. More violations were reported, apparently due in part to a more sympathetic and understanding treatment by police.

▸ Of 153 Kuwaiti women asked if they had ever been assaulted, one-third answered yes. Asked if they knew of friends or relatives who had been victims of such violence, 80 per cent said yes.

▸ In Trinidad and Tobago from 1970 to 1980, the population increased 28 per cent, but the number of men charged with rape rose 134 per cent.

Below are more facts and figures, followed by some quotes which reflect the attitudes that foster violence against women, taken from another UN publication on women:[2]

▸ In parts of Papua New Guinea, 67 per cent of women are victims of marital violence.

▸ One in seven wives in the United Kingdom has been raped by her spouse.

▸ In India, five women are burned in dowry-related disputes each day.

▸ In the United States, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes; between 3 and 4 million are battered each year.

Why such globally pervasive violence? Its source seems to lie in the firmly entrenched patriarchal traditions and attitudes which have been passed on for generations. For example,

▸ "A woman's heaven is under her husband's feet." (Bengali proverb)

▸ The gist of a Spanish riddle is:

"Question: What do mules and women have in common?

Answer: A good beating makes them both better".

▸ "A little rape is good for a man's soul." (American author Norman Mailer)

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[1] Source: *The World's Women: 1970-1990* (UN Sales Publication E.90.XVIII.3)

[2] Source: *Women: Challenges to the Year 2000* (UN Sales Publication: E.91.I.21)

Rutgers University Centre for Women's Global Leadership published the following statistics in conjunction with a campaign called "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence", from 25 November to 10 December (Human Rights Day) 1991:[3]

- In Latin America, one Mexican study states that 61 per cent of housewives are battered, while a Chilean study shows that 80 per cent of women have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
- In the U.S.A., 4,000 women are beaten to death each year by their partners, and a woman is raped every six minutes.
- In Africa, 80 million women have endured sexual mutilation.
- In France, 95 per cent of victims of violence are women, 51 per cent at the hands of a spouse or lover.

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

These data represent only the tip of a much larger iceberg. Many criminologists believe that domestic violence against women is perhaps the most underreported crime, because disputes within the privacy of the family, even if they involve outright physical abuse, are often not perceived as criminal acts, either by the perpetrators, by the victims themselves or by the legal system. Recently, however, some countries have made domestic violence a minor assault, thereby enabling the police legally to intervene. For example, Brazil's ongoing efforts to curb such crimes through the establishment of police stations staffed with women officers who specialize in violent crimes against women was first reported in a 1986 United Nations expert group meeting on violence.

Rape is another crime which goes largely underreported, due to the social stigma, the "legal difficulties" and the contempt shown towards rape victims in many societies. Progress is slow, but there are now a few countries, including Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Poland, the former Soviet Union and Sweden, which have made even marital rape a crime, thus reflecting a far more active stance in protecting women both inside and outside marriage.

Internationally, there has been an increasing conviction that violence violates women's basic human rights. There is also a growing awareness that an international framework is needed to address this issue effectively.

THE UN ROLE IN ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Since its inception, the United Nations has recognized that "human rights are also women's rights". Below are some noteworthy examples of the UN's actions to protect women against abuse:

1948

The United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person (Article 3), and that no one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 5).

1966

The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* both have provisions barring all forms of discrimination in the exercise of human rights. While the Declaration is a manifesto with primarily moral authority, the Covenants are international treaties binding on all ratifying States.

1979

The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* guarantees equal rights to women in the civil, legal and reproductive context. It recognizes that violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination.

1984

The *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* was adopted.

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[3] Source: Centre for Women's Global Leadership. Rutgers/Douglass College, New Jersey, USA.

1989

A book on *Violence against Women in the Family* was produced by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

1990

The *Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders* discussed the issue of violence against women, based on the Report of the Secretary-General (A/CONF.144/17 of 20 July 1990). This Report states that violence against women is a result of the power imbalance between men and women, and that violence serves to sustain this imbalance.

1991

An *Expert Group Meeting on Violence against Women* was convened at Vienna in November 1991. It discussed the preparation of an international instrument in the form of a *Declaration* to serve as a blueprint for defining and dealing with the problem. This instrument would also serve as a legal framework for countries to incorporate into national legislation.

DEFINING VIOLENCE

Violence against women is partially a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between the sexes which has led to domination of and discrimination against women and consequently to the prevention of their advancement. For all its comprehensiveness in other realms, the 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* did not explicitly address this issue. However, the Committee monitoring the Convention requested States parties to report on violence against women—both the harm done to the individual woman and the adverse consequences for society as a whole.

In elaborating their proposed definition of violence as "any act, omission, controlling behaviour or threat, in any sphere, which results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological injury to women", the experts identified examples of such behaviour, encompassing, but not limited to:

- "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including wife battering, incest, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female circumcision, non-spousal violence, financial discrimination and exploitation;
- "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation in the work place, trafficking in women and forced prostitution and degrading representation of women in the media;
- "physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State wherever it occurs."

A TOUGH BATTLE: MAKING IT HAPPEN

The book *Women: Challenges to the Year 2000* captures the gravity of the problem in its observation that "a woman's right to be free from danger and fear for her personal safety within the home, the workplace and society is likely to be the toughest battle women will wage in the 1990s".

The very plethora of types of violence against women is itself evidence of the need to halt such pervasive mistreatment of other human beings. Eradication of this problem will demand a concerted effort on the part of individuals, nations and the entire international community.

In response, the Expert Group Meeting has called for action: namely, that the Commission on the Status of Women at its 1992 session consider recommending that a *Declaration on Violence against Women* be adopted by the General Assembly. It has also suggested the possibility of a special thematic rapporteur on violence against women and, if necessary, an Optional Protocol to the Convention or even a totally separate Convention on Violence against Women.

Finally, it called upon all nations and the international community as a whole to make a clear commitment to eradicate acts of violence against women which constitute such an obstacle to their achievement of equality, development and peace as envisaged in the 1985 *Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000*.

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